

Diabetes and Your Oral Health

What is the relationship between oral health and diabetes?

If you have diabetes, you need to take extra care of your mouth. People with diabetes are at a greater risk of developing gum (periodontal) disease. In addition, having diabetes can make your mouth more susceptible to infection, slow to heal following oral surgery, or chronically dry.

What is gum disease and why am I at greater risk?

There are two types of gum disease, gingivitis and periodontitis.

Gingivitis - This is the mildest form of gum disease and is reversible if treated properly. Gingivitis is caused by the buildup of plaque on teeth. This bacteria-filled plaque causes gums to become swollen and red.

Symptoms: gum tenderness, bleeding when brushing and/or flossing, inflammation, pain

Periodontitis - This is the more destructive form of gum disease and is not reversible (although the disease's progression can be halted). Periodontitis is the major cause of tooth loss in adults. It is caused when the bacteria in plaque invade the gum tissue and cause infection. Eventually this infection wears away at the bone that holds teeth in place. If it is not treated, the teeth will loosen and fall out. Like all infections, periodontitis can cause blood sugar to rise.

Symptoms: tooth sensitivity, feeling of intense pressure between teeth, bleeding when brushing and/or flossing, gum recession, root decay, pus between teeth and gums, loosening or loss of teeth

People with diabetes are at greater risk of developing both forms of gum disease because of high levels of glucose (sugar) in the saliva. Since oral bacteria thrive on glucose, people with diabetes are more likely to have gum disease.

How can I prevent gum disease now that I know that I am at risk?

You can prevent gum disease by keeping good control over your blood glucose levels, brushing twice a day, flossing once a day, and routine visits to your dentist.

Other Concerns for Diabetics

Smoking: If you have diabetes and you smoke, you are at an even greater risk of developing gum disease. Quitting smoking will make it easier for you to prevent gum disease and also lower your chances of developing many forms of cancer.

Oral Surgery: Prior to oral surgery or any dental treatment, make certain that your dentist is aware of your diabetes. It is also best for you to schedule morning appointments after you have eaten and taken your insulin. If you have poorly controlled diabetes, you may need to be admitted to a hospital for oral surgery.

Dry Mouth: Dry mouth is sometimes an indication of poorly controlled diabetes. Talk with your dentist or physician if you experience chronic dry mouth. You can ward off dry mouth by drinking plenty of water and avoiding caffeinated drinks, alcohol, and tobacco. In addition, sucking on sugar-free hard candy, mints or chewing sugar-free gum may be helpful. Commercial artificial saliva can be purchased at drug stores if the above suggestions do not provide relief.

Brushing Tips

Always use a soft-bristled toothbrush.

Replace your toothbrush every three months.

Never share a toothbrush, it spreads germs.

How to Brush

- Place the toothbrush against the gum line at a 45-degree angle. Use a small circular motion to brush your teeth and gums.



- Brush back and forth on the chewing surfaces of your teeth holding the brush flat.



- Brush the back of your teeth.



- Brush your tongue! This will freshen your breath and remove germs.
- Brush for at least three minutes, two times a day. Be sure to brush at bedtime to remove bacteria that can cause decay while you are sleeping.

Flossing Tips

Flossing cleans between the teeth where a toothbrush can't reach.

Flossing helps control bad breath.

How to Floss

- Wrap about 18 inches of floss around the middle fingers. Gently slide the floss between the teeth (don't snap the floss into the gums).



- As the floss reaches the gum line, make a C-shape around the tooth until you feel pressure against your tooth.



- Gently scrape the tooth surface with the floss.



- Move the floss as it becomes soiled and repeat the process for each tooth.

Checklist

Tell your dentist that you have diabetes and what medicines you take.

Make your dental appointments in the morning after you have eaten and taken your insulin.

Take your glucose meter with you to your dental appointment.

Make sure your glucose levels are in the appropriate range before your appointment.

Let your dentist know if you are experiencing dry mouth, a change in your sense of taste or bad breath.



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